PROMOTIONS: EVENT MARKETING

Inventive Events Marketers Cutting a Grassroots Edge

Demo teams, sampling, custom-crafting are the means today. By Fara Warner

DAVE HADDON/DUOMO

What do you call a hundred tubas invading Grand Central station at rush hour?

A big brand builder.

For Jose Cuervo tequila, Octuba Fest 1993 was one of the high points in an ongoing three-year event marketing program to anchor Cuervo's No.1 status and expand tequila drinking beyond the bar.

But tuba concerts are just a small part of the strategy. Cuervo also has marketing dollars behind beach volleyball, offbeat winter sports events and Super Bowl bar parties. The tuba fest is part of a regional approach called Cuervo Cities. That allows each metro area, like New York, to build custom-suited events designed to draw thousands of participants and make local retailers happy. The brand image of an irreverent party lifestyle is then enhanced by a national ad campaign from New York agency Grybauskas Beatrice.

"It doesn't take a genius to hang up a sign and sponsor a program," said Steve Goldstein, vp-public relations/event marketing at Heublein, Inc. in Farmington, Conn. "But in a world of crowded sponsorships, you have to do something novel, proprietary and integrated."

Finding unique events is getting more and more difficult. In 1985, event marketing was a $800 million business. This year, an estimated $4.5 billion will be sunk into events ranging from national concert tours to local street fairs. The category is expected to grow 18% to 20% a year through the '90s. "Events are no longer an afterthought," said Festival Productions sr vp Alfred Schreiber.

The new wave in event marketing is to create long-term proprietary events—preferably with a strong local angle—that help build a lifestyle around a brand. "Consumers can either flip through a magazine looking at ads or they can be dancing to tequila songs played on a tuba," Goldstein said. "Which do you think they'd rather do?"

Liquor and cigarette marketers always have been savvy about events. Twenty years ago, companies like Heublein and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco pioneered event marketing by sponsoring music tours and sports such as drag racing. Traditional brands bought network television.

In the '90s, Heublein has tuba fests, Marlboro creates the Adventure Team and Hiram Walker puts together 3,000 demo team events for Fris vodka. Watching what liquor and cigarette marketers do today could give you a glimpse into event marketing's future and how it tries to create long-term brand loyalty along with immediate sales spikes.

The Marlboro Adventure Team was the ultimate created event. It spurred millions to redeem "miles" for gear and put 10 smokers out in the middle of Utah to hike, bike and ride. Jim Morgan, Philip Morris' vice president of marketing, estimates Adventure Team added 1.5% share gain to Marlboro's 3% share gain last year. Each share is worth about $450 million. It also

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spawned an aggressive, colorful advertising campaign that caught consumers' attention.

For R.J. Reynolds, motorsports has been a tradition since it first sponsored NASCAR races in 1971. The company now sponsors five motorsports events with just the Winston Cup attracting 20 million viewers. In 1994, Reynolds will put $35 million into racing.

In the past, Reynolds' involvement has been traditional: signage and merchandise. This year the new Smokin' Joe's Racing Team takes to the race track in Winston-sponsored events like the NASCAR Winston Cup and the brand's drag racing series. Now Reynolds can leverage more than the Winston name. Old Joe, Camel's spokescharacter, gets a piece of the action. Racing merchandise can be offered through Camel Cash. Audiences can interact with the team more so than a static sponsorship where they are passive observers. Reynolds also sees it as a way to nab some Marlboro smokers.

"The Smokin' Joe team will help us win over competitive smokers," said T. Wayne Robertson, Reynolds' sr vp of sports marketing. "People in the stands might not be Winston smokers, but we want them to know we have Winston Select and Camel that are more in line with Marlboro."

While cigarette marketers might spend more than their liquor counterparts, spirits marketers are becoming more creative and interactive with their events.

Cuervo isn't the only Heublein brand with an event marketing angle. Finlandia has its Clean Water Challenge. Black Velvet sponsored the Tanya Tucker concert tour and made Tucker the Black Velvet lady. Yukon Jack Canadian liqueur's sponsorship of amateur and pro arm wrestling has made that testosterone event a trend. It bought Heublein more space than any one-page ad. A 10-page story appeared in *Sports Illustrated* and *The Wall Street Journal* put it on the front page.

Marlboro corporate parent Philip Morris is the biggest U.S. sponsorship spender; for Jose Cuervo tequila, the Octuba Fest of 1993 was one of the high points of an ongoing three-year event marketing program to anchor Cuervo's No.1 status and expand tequila drinking beyond the bar.

But Cuervo has been the biggest and most successful test case for Heublein. Cuervo controls about 60% of the domestic tequila market. So the brand didn't need to bust into a category. What it did need was new drinkers as the tequila category grows and more brands enter the market. Heublein also wanted to push tequila consumption into homes and take some share away from beer.

October is a traditional beer drinking month. But Cuervo put tequila into people's hands and gave them a free concert and kazoos. "All that translates into memories for people," said Donal Egan, director of events at Grybauskas Beatrice. "That creates a relationship."

Hiram Walker & Sons faced an even more difficult task than pulling a few drinkers away from beer. It had to fight a brand that had built intense relationships with its customers.

The company wanted to bring out Frîs imported vodka in a category controlled by Absolut vodka. Absolut's Michel Roux is considered the godfather of event marketing. He dabbles in art, fashion and causes like AIDS awareness. "We decided against being a me-too brand," said Tom Hess, sr vp at The HK Group, Hiram Walker's sales promo agency.

Instead Hiram Walker created its own mini-events. Three thousand of them in fact. Dressed in slinky silver outfits, the Frîs Style Demo Teams hit gallery openings, charity events and bar parties. That sampling also led to a 1,500-name database for the Frîs Check program. Customers get "checks" for money off of Frîs. Hiram Walker declined to say how well Frîs demo teams have done, but the brand is now in 70% of the country with sales over 100,000 cases.

Jim Beam went back to bars to boost its bourbon. But it wanted more than signage and bar games. The 20-city Jim Beam Country Caravan helped catapult lesser known country music performers, like Radney Foster and Lucinda Ely, into the limelight and made the brown spirit popular with the under-30 set. Beam also runs a national talent search along with the tour to help promote new bands.

"We didn't want to be some brand that found out country music was hot and tack the name onto a concert tour," said Stephen Dessau, president of Track Marketing, the Time-Warner music division that puts the event together.

So from the beginning, the tour was a grassroots effort. The caravan enters its third year in 1994 and will be put on in smaller cities at local bars.

"The days of some guy in the national office choosing an event that doesn't even fit with the brand image are gone," Dessau said. ■

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